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United Nations University

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 51/187, *inter alia*, requested the Secretary-General to continue the interaction between the United Nations University (UNU) and other bodies of the United Nations system, to ensure the integration of the work of the University to enable the United Nations system to draw more extensively on the work of the University, and to submit a report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session.
2. The present report should be considered in conjunction with the report of the Council of the United Nations University on the work of the University in 1997 (A/53/31), which contains a separate section describing, in a comprehensive manner, the various aspects of the interfacing between the University and the United Nations. The information presented here complements and brings up to date the developments discussed in the report of the Council as well as in a similar report submitted two years ago by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly (A/51/324).
3. Developments in the past two years underline the continuing expansion of the substantive interactions between the United Nations University and the United Nations system. This has focused on two interrelated levels: the provision of inputs in support of United Nations intergovernmental deliberative and decision-making processes and increased participation and contributions of the University to the activities and work of the United Nations.
4. The appointment of a new Rector of the University in September 1997 has given added impetus to substantive policy and programmatic cooperation between United Nations organizations and the University. The new Rector initiated an intensive round of consultations with United Nations senior officials which were intended to identify possible areas of cooperation where the University could, in accordance with the mandate of its Charter and in the context of its autonomy within the framework of the United Nations, make useful contributions to the work of the Organization. Against this background, the University is currently in the process of reviewing its programmes so that it might be in a better position to act as a bridge between the United Nations and the international academic community and to perform think-tank functions for the Organization. Concurrently, a strategic plan for the years 1999–2002 is also being developed within UNU, which stresses that the University should be guided by principles relevant to its work as both an academic institution and as part of the United Nations system.

II. Reform and revitalization of the United Nations

A. Strategic Planning Unit

5. The implementation of the Secretary-General's reform proposals, particularly those within his prerogative, including the establishment of the Executive Committees and the establishment of the Strategic Planning Unit (SPU) will have a significant impact on the interface between the United Nations University and the United Nations.
6. The establishment of the SPU in the office of the Secretary-General will provide a critical link between the United Nations and the United Nations University and other United Nations research entities. The Unit will, *inter alia*, address substantive areas which are becoming major policy issues, coordinate reports which cut across major sectors and units, liaise with policy planning units in other international organizations and help in the process of strategic coordination through the Executive Committee structure established by the Secretary-General. These are some of the tasks where the link with the national think-tanks and the academic communities, as represented through UNU and other United Nations research entities, is extremely important.
7. In its design SPU will work closely with the United Nations University and its Council, on the one hand and with relevant Departments, programmes and Funds, on the other. Through this process the United Nations University will be drawn into a larger strategic planning network which will help involve the University and the academic community in the upstream policy work and the strategic planning work of the United Nations.

B. Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs

8. In the economic and social area, the Secretary-General has brought concerned United Nations entities together through the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, which comprises not only the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) (UNCHS) and the regional commissions, but also the United Nations University and other United Nations research and

training entities (the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)).

9. The United Nations University has been fully involved in the activities of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs from the time of its establishment. In addition to regular participation in the Committee's deliberations, including elaboration of consolidated Committee proposals to the Secretary-General, UNU developed and submitted specific inputs for a number of the Committee's projects, such as the proposals on the utilization of the "development dividend".

10. The University has played an important role in the efforts of the Executive Committee to enhance further the involvement of the academic community, an important and influential component of global civil society, in the formulation and assessment of social, economic and environmental policies and their translation into action at the country, regional and interregional levels. In that context, the University was asked by the Executive Committee to review and evaluate a number of major United Nations economic flagship reports, with a view to identifying a process that could be used to make recommendations for achieving a clearer architecture between the reports and which indicates how these could be improved.

III. Follow-up to United Nations conferences

11. The United Nations University has been closely involved in the substantive work in support of the major United Nations conferences of the 1990s. In the follow-up and implementation phase a significant role can be played by the University, particularly in relation to capacity-building and impact evaluation. Studies should focus on the links between normative and operational aspects of global conferences and summits for the translation of these international political commitments into national policies and institutions. In particular, the analysis of how national policies and priorities support conferences goals and the effectiveness of follow-up and monitoring would help to identify areas where the coordinated intervention of the United Nations is most needed.

12. The evaluation of the impact of this intervention on national follow-up efforts and achieved results is of primary concern to the United Nations system in order to determine

the level of success of its operational activities and their future directions. The research and analysis of adequate evaluation methodologies, along with ways of establishing more systematic arrangements to facilitate the sharing of information and good practices with the building of effective institutional memory, are very important aspects that need further attention. The United Nations University could be very helpful in these areas.

A. General Assembly special sessions

13. The United Nations University has already participated in the follow-up process for several conferences. In preparation for the special session of the General Assembly held in June 1997 for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of Agenda 21, the University cooperated closely with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the designated task manager for this area, in the follow-up process to chapter 13 of Agenda 21,¹ entitled "Managing fragile ecosystems: sustainable mountain development". In this respect, a major contribution was made to the special session through the publication of a study entitled *Mountains of the World: A Global Priority*, edited by B. Messerly and J. D. Ives.

B. Forthcoming reviews of conferences

14. In the forthcoming special session on the World Summit for Social Development, the primary objective of which is an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit, the UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU/WIDER) is co-sponsoring, with the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, a study of the economic and social responsibilities of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions. The study will be published in 1999 and will be made available to the preparatory process for the special session.

15. The main thrust of the UNU International Network on Water, Environment and Health (UNU/INWEH) current programme is capacity-building, targeted research and information dissemination in support of watershed management and conservation in developing countries. The programme consists primarily of projects on aquatic ecosystem assessment and protection, water and waste-water treatment and water-related human health impact. The programme has actively contributed to the work of the

Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Water Resources and the Commission on Sustainable Development, which at its sixth session in 1998, considered freshwater management as its sectoral theme and transfer of technology, capacity-building education, science and awareness-raising as its cross-sectoral theme for in-depth consideration.

16. Drawing on ongoing policy-oriented studies on new technologies and their impact on women workers, the UNU Institute for New Technologies (UNU/INTECH) prepared a policy with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) entitled "Gender and telecommunications – an agenda for policy" and presented it at the World Telecommunications and Development Conference held in Malta from 23 March to 1 April 1998. The paper, and the discussion on it, led to the adoption of a resolution calling for the incorporation of a gender dimension in all aspects of ITU's work.

C. Other

17. The pervasive theme of the United Nations University programme on land and biodiversity is food security. The programme focuses on applied research, demonstration, and capacity-building at the micro- and meso-scale. Cross-cutting themes include a participatory development approach, indigenous and local knowledge and the role of women in natural resource management. It is expected that this programme will be the University's main contribution to the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its eighth session, in 2000, with land resources as the sectoral theme and agriculture as the economic sector/major group. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNU and the Tokyo metropolitan government collaborated in the recently convened World Conference on International Cooperation of Cities and Citizens (Eco-Partnership Tokyo), held in Tokyo, from 26 to 29 May 1998. It was an opportunity to hold in-depth discussions on cooperation in the work of the United Nations on mega-cities and urban development.

IV. United Nations standing processes and the United Nations University

A. General Assembly

18. The United Nations University provides continuous support for the efforts of the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly, as well as the Economic and Social Council, to enhance their interaction with experts and knowledge-related institutions in order to enrich and deepen the substance of their policy deliberations. One recent example of UNU involvement is its support for the series of informal briefings organized by the Bureau of the Second Committee in connection with the implementation of General Assembly resolution 52/179, entitled "Global partnership for development: high-level international intergovernmental consideration of financing for development". In the spring of 1998, the United Nations University Press issued a volume entitled *International Cooperation and Developing Countries in a Year of Crisis*, featuring presentations made on the 1997 international financial and currency crisis in the context of the Second Committee's consideration of its agenda item on the financing of development. It is expected that the University will continue to cooperate closely with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in supporting the planning and financing of similar events in the future.

B. The Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary machinery

19. UNITAR and UNU have launched a series of annual seminars and workshops to provide delegates in New York with the necessary skills and understanding of issues related to sustainable development, in particular the linkages between policy and practice. The first session was held on 16 March 1998 and focused on recent developments in the area of national planning processes. The objective of the second session, which was planned and conducted in close cooperation with the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), was to review policy and practices related to education on sustainable development issues. The outcome of the meeting was brought to the attention of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which considered, at its sixth session in 1998, chapter 36 of Agenda 21, on education, public awareness and training. One last seminar for 1998 is being planned and will be held early in the fall

in the course of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. It will deal with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.² Delegations in New York have expressed appreciation for the timeliness of these efforts and the relevance to their work. Both UNITAR and UNU are actively considering the possibility of developing similar seminars and workshops in the years ahead.

20. UNU/INTECH supported the activities of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development by participating in meetings and by making available all the documentation and information it had produced and commissioned for its information technology workplace.

21. UNU/INTECH advised the Commission on gender issues in information technology and a staff member acted as the Chair of the Gender Advisory Panel.

V. United Nations University research programmes and links with United Nations analytical work

22. Collaborative research work is in progress involving various components of the United Nations University system with the United Nations Secretariat, UNCTAD, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNIFEM, the regional commissions, the International Labour Organization (ILO), FAO and UNESCO among others.

23. The United Nations University and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the Secretariat are developing jointly the United Nations University's project on "The foundations of peace".

24. Cooperation between UNU and UNEP led to the successful bid for inclusion of the United Nations University project on "People, land management and environmental change" (UNU/PLEC) into the Global Environment Facility (GEF) portfolio. GEF pledged US\$ 6.17 million towards the project, which will be executed with UNEP as the GEF partner.

VI. Coordination and interaction within the United Nations system

A. Interaction with the United Nations Secretariat

25. Regular informal substantive consultations are held between the Rector and the senior academic staff of the United Nations University and United Nations senior officials. A number of meetings have been held to help in the preparation of the UNU Strategic Plan. Such consultations have led to a significant reformulation of UNU programmes which are now clustered around the two main themes of peace and governance, and sustainable development. Increased attention has been devoted to matters of immediate concern to the United Nations, and the policy contents and relevance of the University studies has been enhanced. This has been the case in particular for the UNU programme on peace and governance, which deals with such matters of immediate concern to the United Nations as the implications of the changing nature of democracy, an evaluation of the corporate culture of the United Nations Secretariat, and patterns and modalities of cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations in peacekeeping operations.

26. UNU's research, training and capacity-building and dissemination in the field of the environment are guided by the overall principles of Agenda 21. Following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the University prepared an agenda which identifies three interrelated points of entry as basic perspectives for UNU programmes: eco-restructuring, with emphasis on major technological, economic and social transformations; the capacity of eco-systems (i.e. their capacity to tolerate and respond to human interventions or disruptions attributable to natural causes) and environmental governance (i.e. the means, norms, processes and institutions by which the State and society and civil society manage development in an environmentally sustainable manner).

27. The United Nations University continued to be a full participant in the United Nations sabbatical leave programme since 1996. A University representative sits on the programme's selection committee and the University has indicated its readiness to make available to prospective applicants support services and facilities.

B. Participation in the Administrative Committee on Coordination

28. In accordance with procedures determined by the Secretary-General in his previous report to the General Assembly (A/51/324, paras. 32-35) and subsequently endorsed by the ACC, the United Nations University is systematically kept informed of the ACC work programme so that the ACC can benefit from UNU's participation in its meetings, in particular on agenda items where the research and related activities of the UNU would have an especially important contribution to make to the work of the ACC. In addition, provisions were made for establishing periodic consultations between the Rector of the University and ACC members to identify research topics for inclusion in the UNU programme that could serve to maximize the UNU contribution to the work of the United Nations system. In that context, the Rector of the University participated in the fall 1997 session of ACC.

29. As in the past, the United Nations University has played an active substantive role in the subsidiary machinery of ACC, most notably in its subcommittees dealing with nutrition, water resources and women, respectively.

C. Interaction with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

30. The links between UNU and UNESCO are regular, numerous and diversified. There are several concrete examples of cooperation between UNU and UNESCO in the fields of education, science, social sciences, culture and communication. Some examples are given in the following paragraphs.

31. UNU and UNESCO, together with the Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific, organized a conference on "National Strategies and Regional Cooperation for the Twenty-first Century" (the Asia-Pacific regional conference leading to the World Conference on Higher Education, to be held in Paris in 1998), which was held at UNU headquarters at Tokyo in July 1997. UNU has been closely involved with the World Conference on Higher Education and it is expected that a UNESCO-UNU forum on higher education will be developed, with the objective of establishing a permanent and global process to monitor trends in higher education. The agreement between UNU and UNESCO in the framework of the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme will reinforce the decision of the Rector to re-

establish and reinforce the system of associated institutions of UNU. Through the network on education for peace, human rights and democracy, communications, sustainable development, higher and distance education, UNU will have automatic access to several higher education institutions all over the world.

32. UNESCO and UNU, together with the Third World Academy of Sciences, promoted the South-South Cooperation Programme on Environmentally Sound Socio-Economic Development in the Humid Tropics. As part of that Programme, a workshop was organized in December in Yunnan Province, China. UNU's input into this workshop was primarily given through UNU/PLEC.

33. The International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP), under the auspices of UNESCO, is working with UNU on its project on "Microprocessors and informatics".

34. UNU and UNESCO signed an agreement establishing a UNESCO-UNU International Leadership Academy (UNU/ILA) chair in leadership studies.

35. The UNU Institute of Advanced Studies (UNU/IAS) and UNESCO signed an agreement establishing a UNESCO-UNU/IAS chair on the global economy.

36. UNU and the Government of Namibia began work on the concept and practice of zero emissions in Africa under the UNU-UNESCO chair agreement that was signed in 1996.

37. UNU and Beijing University in China continued work under the UNU-UNESCO chair in plant biotechnology.

VII. Conclusion

38. The innovative measures that have progressively been introduced to enhance UNU interaction with the United Nations have been of great mutual benefit. Greater efforts are being made to increase awareness of the work of UNU. Public information activities of UNU are targeted at heightening the visibility of its academic programmes and achievements. Overall, emphasis is currently placed on improving the quality and quantity of public information material and on reaching out to targeted audiences in the media, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations and the general public. A special effort is being made by UNU to raise the profile and awareness of the University in the host country and in New York. At United Nations Headquarters, public forums have been organized since February 1995 to disseminate among practitioners and scholars the results of the research undertaken by UNU. Overall, 2,000 participants have been drawn into these

events from the United Nations Secretariat, the permanent missions, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions.

Notes

¹ *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), vol. I: *Resolutions adopted by the Conference*, resolution I, annex II.

² A/AC.237/18 (Part II)/Add. I and Corr. I, annex I.
